

A GOOD YEAR, BUT CHALLENGES LIE AHEAD



Andrew Kennedy

The original West Kent Group is now entering its fourth year, and in March 2017 we will mark three years of working together as a group of five, based at Paddock Wood.

As in any situation which requires co-operation and compromise, there are the inevitable bumps along the road, but it is to the credit of our five Associations that these have been resolved in a professional and friendly manner.



Jon Botten

The West Kent Group was not set up to replace Associations or take over their autonomy, and we have all worked hard to ensure this is maintained.

Our remit was and remains to provide professional advice and support in terms of campaigning, training and development, membership retention and recruitment, fundraising and compliance.

Our five member Associations remain independent; they hold their own AGMs, elect their own local Officers, manage their affairs via their locally elected Executive Councils and select their own local candidates.

One thing that has changed from our original terms of reference is our approach to fundraising. It became apparent very early on that by working together and using our combined strength, we could attract higher profile speakers and raise more money than working alone.

Over the years we have developed our popular series of **"An Audience with..."** and with the help and support of the tireless Ann Widdecombe, we launched the West Kent 500+ Club in January this year. Jon and I take some satisfaction that our efforts at the Paddock Wood office have raised an additional £29,250 this year.

Despite our successes there are many challenges ahead. Every Brexit headline brings a flurry of complaints from one side or the other. In May we will face elections for KCC. The Boundary Review will result in major changes to local constituencies and how we operate.

The West Kent Campaign HQ is now seen as the model for the future. The structure we put in place here is now being copied throughout the UK and we are widely acknowledged as a centre of excellence. Local members should take pride in having the courage and foresight to support the establishment of the Campaign Centre, and celebrate its success.

Thank you for your support and best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Andrew Kennedy



WINNING HERE!

One of the many advantages of working as a team is the ability to pool our resources when we have an important by-election to fight. This was most evident on the 8th December when we faced a difficult by-election in the Trench ward in Tonbridge.

Trench had been a safe Labour ward from 1950 until 2007. The sad death of the popular councillor, Jean Atkinson, gave Labour a chance to win back the seat, particularly when the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats both withdrew from the contest and backed Labour in a tactical anti-Conservative "progressive alliance".

Following a great campaign, supported by activists from across West Kent, Labour and UKIP were thwarted. Local Conservative candidate Georgina Thomas not only won, but increased the Conservative vote by an amazing 18%, polling 61% of the votes compared with 21% for Labour and 18% for UKIP. This was one of the biggest swings this year and our best ever result in this ward!

We also helped delivered a great victory in Gravesham East on Thursday 18th August. Although Gravesham isn't part of the West Kent Group, we were asked by the local Association to help run their campaign. Again, following a great effort by our team, we won the seat off Labour with a direct swing of 8%.

Unsuccessful Trench ward UKIP candidate, Dave Allen told the Times of Tonbridge:

"We lost because West Kent Tories have a sleeker campaign machine."

MEMBERSHIP UP

BUT WITH A NOTE OF CAUTION!

Across West Kent the party finished the year with a net increase in membership of 306, with four of our five associations showing an increase.

Association	Dec 2015	Dec 2016	Change
C&A	187	169	-18
F&MK	358	403	+45
M&tW	286	350	+64
T&M	635	722	+87
TW	511	639	+128
Total	1977	2283	+306

Much of the increase was due to the large increase in membership in the weeks following the EU Referendum on 23 June. Without this, our membership would, at best, have remained stable.

The West Kent Campaign HQ undertook detailed research about our new members and what encouraged them to join. The research was published by Conservative Home and also featured in the Sunday Times. If you are interested, you can read the report at tinyurl.com/membershipsurge



AN AUDIENCE WITH...

One of the most popular events we run from the West Kent office is our quarterly **"An Audience with..."** when members are invited to hear a national figure speak about their life and achievements.

We try to organise four of these events each year and have managed to attract many first rate guests. This year we have welcomed Lord Baker, Boris Johnson MP, Charles Moore and Jacob Rees-Mogg MP.

Tickets for these events are usually a very affordable £10 or £12 per person, with the

option to pay an extra £20 to attend the "after show" Wine and Canape Reception, with a chance to meet the guest speaker in person.

The profit raised at these events is donated to the local Association on a *pro-rata* basis. For example, if 40% of the tickets are sold to Maidstone members, 40% of the profit is allocated to the Maidstone Association.

Over the last year our **"An Audience with..."** series has raised an amazing £11,000 for Association funds plus a

further £3,000 which was donated to London Mayoral Campaign.

We are in the process of organising our 2017 series of events, starting on Thursday 23 February 2017 with former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord (Norman) Lamont, who will be interviewed on stage by Tom Tugendhat MBE MP at the E M Forster Theatre at Tonbridge School.

For further information or to reserve your tickets for this event please visit:

tinyurl.com/NomanLamont

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2017

Our five local Associations have just completed the selection process for the 2017 Kent CC elections. Each Association elects a Local Government Committee at its AGM; this committee consists of elected members, councillors (appointed by the Conservative Group Leader) and the Officers of the Association. The LGC is responsible for interviewing and approving suitable candidates, following rules and procedures set out by the party nationally.

The process starts with "approval interviews" when both incumbent councillors seeking re-election and new applicants are interviewed and assessed against pre-determined criteria. Provided the applicant is successful at this stage (and not all are, about 15% fail to pass this initial interview for a variety of reasons) they are placed on the "approved list". Those on the "approved list" are then invited to apply for specific seats. There is no such thing as automatic re-selection, any approved candidate may put their name forward for any seat. If there are more applicants than vacancies, a selection contest is held, allowing paid-up members the right to hear and question the applicants, and to vote by secret ballot to select the candidate they wish to fight the election on their behalf. The candidates selected are then ratified by the Association's Executive Council.

If any member would like further information on the work of your Association's Local Government Committee or details about how you can put your name forward to serve on the committee next year, please email Andrew Kennedy at the address overleaf. For information about how to become a Conservative candidate at a future local election, please download our booklet at: <https://tinyurl.com/ConCouncillor>

ANN WIDDECOMBE'S 500+ CLUB

In January 2016, with the backing and support of Ann Widdecombe, we launched the Kent 500+ Club. The goal was to enrol a minimum of 500 members, each paying £30 per year. 50% of the money raised would be returned in prizes and the remainder going into a fund to finance future election campaigns.

The 500+ Club was a great success with 850 members joining in the first year. Over the course of the year over £10,000 was awarded in prizes ranging from £100—£2,500 with a total contribution to the local Conservatives of £10,000. This was allocated on a pro-rata basis, based on where the 500+ Club members lived.

C&A: £1,882 F&MK: £1,257 M&tW: £1,395
T&M: £3,382 TW: £2,092 **Total: £10,008**

For further information or to join the 500+ Club for 2017 please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/Con500Club>



PATRONS' CLUB

Each of our local Associations run a Patrons' Club. Patrons pay an enhanced membership of £200 for a single member or £300 for a couple. Patrons are then invited to two complimentary events each year:

A **Summer Garden Party** held in Kent with a local MP as guest

An **Annual Dinner** at a prestigious London venue, such as the Carlton Club or similar, addressed by a leading member of the government.

Recent guests have included **Theresa May MP** and **Ruth Davidson MSP**.

For further information on how to become a Patron please contact Andrew Kennedy at the West Kent Office.

YOUR 2017 KENT CC CANDIDATES

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